

Where to Eat

THE ONLY BANGKOK RESTAURANT GUIDE
TO TELL IT HOW IT REALLY IS

IMAGE asia

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Primer on Booze: Tequila by The Wandering Gourmet

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FEATURES



Tequila, Mexico's gift to the spirit world, was long considered a beverage for macho men drinking in sweltering and seedy cantinas in Mexican border towns. But the world's drinking habits aren't etched in stone. Today, Tequila is respectable and a favourite with many women, including many Thais.

There are many reasons for this remarkable surge in appeal. The most obvious is the growing popularity of Mexican food. A Mexican dinner without a margarita is almost unthinkable – and margaritas are made with tequila. The popularity of Latin nightspots also appears to have played a role. In addition to teaching the world about the rumba and tango, they've introduced many people to the delights of rum and tequila based drinks. And last but not least, there's that intangible that no one can adequately explain: fashion. Tequila is cool and hip, the drink of the world's beautiful people. Once anything reaches this exalted status, popularity is guaranteed – until something else comes along.

Tequila, Mexico's gift to the spirit world...

Like all hard spirits, tequila is distilled from a plant based brew that has been fermented so that it contains alcohol. In the case of tequila, the pre-existing beverage is the cooked and fermented sap of an agave plant, a family of succulents that thrive in Mexico, Central America and the southwestern United States. Although tequila is often said to be extremely high in alcohol content, it is no different from whisky or other hard liquors.



The cooked saps from several different types of agave are fermented to make locally consumed alcoholic beverages that haven't been distilled. The best known is pulque, a beverage that was popular in Mexico long before the arrival of the Europeans. Although pulque has largely been replaced by European style beer, it is still the favourite in some remote areas.



Wherever cultures have produced a fermented drink, once for the distillation technology is introduced, a hard spirit based upon the pre existing beverage is almost inevitable. When the Spaniards brought distillation to Mexico, pulque and other agave fermented beverages were distilled to make mescal.

Tequila, by law, must be made from the blue agave and must be brewed in and around the state of Jalisco.

In reality, tequila is a special kind of mescal. The biggest difference between the two beverages is the type of agave used in making them. Tequila, by law, must be made from the blue agave and must

be brewed in and around the state of Jalisco. Mescal, on the other hand, can be made from any one of several agave plants and is usually produced in the state of Oaxaca. Now that tequila is popular and often in short supply, mescal producers have been aggressively marketing their products and it is beginning to grow in popularity outside of Mexico.

There are several categories of tequila available and knowing the differences is important to consumers. There is a big difference, for example, between tequilas labeled "premium" or "super premium" and those without these appellations.

Probably the oldest way of making beer, and the one used in the West, is to allow some of the grains to sprout, a process known as 'malting'. Sprouting causes the production of an enzyme that allows converting starch in the grain into alcohol, a condition necessary for the seedling to derive energy from the starch. It is very easy to imagine our friend the caveman letting some stored grains from wild grasses to get wet and to then sprout. Liquid around the sprouting grains would inevitably ferment and turn into a very rudimentary beer.

Archaeological evidence indicates that this was happening before 3000 B.C. and the Code of Hammurabi of 1750 B.C. even listed punishments for peddlers of beer who adulterated their products.



Premium tequilas must, by law, be made entirely from the blue agave and be brewed and bottled in Mexico. Only 51% of an ordinary tequila needs to be made from the blue agave, the remainder usually comes from distilled sugar syrup. In addition ordinary tequilas are often shipped to the United States in tanker trucks and then bottled.

Tequilas are also assigned categories according to their age and colour and these can be found on the bottle. Clear and unaged tequila is labeled blanco and sold as white or silver tequila. Blancos that are premium tequilas can be very good and shouldn't be ignored because they aren't aged. Carmel-colored, unaged tequila is labeled as joven abocado and is usually sold in the United States as "gold" tequila. These tequilas are never premium and are usually of inferior quality. Aged tequilas are labeled either as reposado or añejo. Reposado, which means "rested," refers to tequila that has been aged in oak for between two months and a year. Añejos are the top of the line and have been aged in oak for at least one year. They have colour because of the cask in which they have been aged and shouldn't be confused with joven abocado. Many añejos are of excellent quality and all are expensive.



Tequila is cool and hip, the drink of the world's beautiful people.

The agave plant is covered with long fibrous leaves with spikes on the end. The centre of the plant, known as a piña in Spanish, is the part used to make tequila. It is cooked in an oven or pressure cooker and then crushed to release the juices. In traditional distilleries the crushed fiber is fermented along with the juice, but



in modern plants it is usually removed and sold as a by-product.

Tequila is a fascinating beverage and one that is surging in popularity. Bottles marked 'premium' or 'super premium' contain the best tequilas. An añejo from one of Mexico's premium producers will rival the finest spirits found anywhere in quality, taste and price.



Tequila Cocktails

Traditional Margarita

Ingredients: 2 oz Tequila; 1 oz Triple Sec; 2 oz lime juice; salt; lime wedge

Method: Rub the rim of a margarita glass with a wedge of lime and dip it into salt. Shake tequila, lime juice and triple sec in a shaker with ice and strain into a margarita glass. Garnish with a lime wedge.

Blender Margarita

Ingredients: 2 oz Tequila; 2 oz lime juice; 1 oz Triple Sec; 1 cup ice cubes; salt; lime wedge

Method: Rub the rim of a margarita glass with a wedge of lime and dip it into salt. Blend tequila, lime juice, triple sec, and ice in a blender. Pour into a margarita glass and garnish with a lime wedge.

Strawberry Margarita

Ingredients: 2 oz Tequila; 1 oz Triple Sec; 2 oz lime juice; 1 oz strawberry liqueur; salt; lime wedge

Method: Rub the rim of a margarita glass with lime wedge and dip into salt. Shake tequila, triple sec, lime juice and strawberry liqueur in a shaker with ice cubes. Strain into a margarita glass.

Tequila Sunrise

Ingredients: 2 oz Tequila; 4 oz orange juice; 1 oz grenadine

Method: Mix the tequila and orange juice in a mixing glass with ice cubes. Strain into a tall highball glass over crushed ice. Pour the grenadine on top and let settle to the bottom.



by *The Wandering Gourmet*

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